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ABSTRACT

The relationship between bidialectalism and literacy in the United States is discussed. The primary issue addressed is whether the spoken language of dialectally divergent groups creates a linguistic mismatch that creates problems in the acquisition of literacy skills. First, the controversy over use of dialect readers, which incorporate nonstandard grammatical forms typical of the vernacular community, to help speakers of non-standard English gain literacy skills is reviewed and examined from a sociolinguistic viewpoint. The need to consider simple linguistic as well as cultural differences as a factor in reading failure among vernacular-speaking populations is emphasized. A perspective on language variation is offered for practitioners. This approach acknowledges systematic differences between dialects in the sound-symbol relationship and in grammar, which result in miscues. Implications for both instruction and assessment are noted. For vernacular dialect speakers learning literacy skills, an open discussion of language prejudice, a brief examination of the legitimate history of the vernacular dialect, and an examination of exemplary structures is seen as valuable in moving learners to a less stigmatized view of their dialect. For learners of English as a Second Language, it may be useful to incorporate language variation into literacy instruction. A 12-item bibliography is included. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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# Bidialectal Literacy in the United States

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## INTRODUCTION

The question of dialect diversity and literacy among native English speakers in the United States represents somewhat of a unique challenge to those considering the issue of biliteracy, particularly as it compares with the kinds of bilingual situations that have been the focus of other papers in this seminar. As a straightforward language issue, the question of bidialectal literacy can be reduced to a relatively simple question: does the spoken language of dialectally divergent groups create a linguistic mismatch that is responsible for creating problems in the acquisition of literacy skills? The correlation of low literacy skills with membership in vernacular-speaking groups is indisputable, but the question of causation is another matter. In this respect, of course, some of the language issues that impact on the role of dialect differences in literacy contrast clearly with bilingual situations, where language proficiency always has to be considered on some level as a potential variable.

From a broader sociocultural perspective, however, it is indisputable that dialect differences do enter the sociolinguistic equation, whether or not there is a significant

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linguistic mismatch between the language of the speaker and the written language. The stark reality of literacy education in bidialectal situations is that language differences are rarely ignored, and that these differences may strongly influence the perceptions, expectations, and even practical instructional strategies in literacy education. For example, suppose a teacher of literacy skills assumes that a vernacular dialect speaker cannot hope to access the Standard English of written English text without a knowledge of spoken Standard English. As a result of this understanding, literacy education may combine instruction in spoken Standard English with other literacy skills related to reading and writing. Thus, inordinate amounts of time might be assigned to skills with questionable bearing on the actual acquisition of literacy skills per se.

By the same token, vernacular dialect speakers themselves are likely to be socialized into the American mythology that vernacular dialects are simply unworthy approximations of the standard variety with little linguistic validity in their own right. Given this attitude, they may feel that their "broken" or "corrupted" English precludes them from ever acquiring a full range of literacy skills. Thus, their acquisition of literacy skills is impeded by a self-fulfilling prophesy about their literacy potential. These cases are not far-fetched scenarios; in fact, I believe that there are probably literacy education encounters that follow these scenarios quite closely, and I have observed some of these cases firsthand.

In the following presentation, I would like to discuss the critical need for informed perspective on language variation in approaching literacy in a bidialectal context. I will approach this first by reliving an old controversy in the language planning of bidialectal literacy -- the case of "dialect readers". This case is instructive because it points to some of the broad sociopolitical and sociolinguistic issues that surround bidialectal literacy, particularly as it is similar to and different from the issues surrounding bilingual literacy. At the same time, this case underscores the need for practical information about the nature of language variation for literacy practitioners and vernacular dialect speakers themselves.

## THE DIALECT READER CONTROVERSY

It is now two decades since the "dialect reader" controversy erupted, and yet we still reap the effects of the phobia that it engendered in many educational and popular circles. Applied social dialectologists are still often reminded by an unforgetting and unforgiving educational establishment and general public that a few of us once attempted to convince educators that it was at least worthwhile to experiment with dialect readers to see if they helped incipient readers gain access to the literate world.

The lesson of dialect readers is a worthy one to review here, as it places the issue of bidialectal literacy in its true sociopolitical context. For the record, a so-called <u>dialect</u>

reader is a text that incorporates the nonstandard grammatical forms typical of a vernacular-speaking community. As a brief illustration of how a dialect reader looked, we may compare two versions of the same text, one in Standard English and one in the vernacular dialect.

Standard English Version

"Look down here," said Suzy.
"I can see a girl in here.
That girl looks like me.
Come here and look, David!
Can you see that girl?"...

Vernacular Black English Version

Susan say, "Hey, you-all, look down here!"
"I could see a girl in here.
That girl, she look like me.
Come here and look, David!
Could you see the girl?"...

(from Wolfram and Fasold 1974:198)

The second passage is a deliberate attempt to incorporate the features of vernacular dialect into a basal reader, in this case, a primer for children. The aim of dialect readers, which typically use a standard English orthography rather than a modified, dialect spelling, was never intended to develop a dualistic reading system as some opponents contended, but simply

to use a familiar language system in the initial step in the reading process. This beginning phase was then to be followed by a transition stage which would lead a reader into materials written in the standard written variety. Although the use of dialect readers seemed like a radical departure from traditional approaches and materials in reading, it needs to be noted at the outset here that this is not the only example of specially adapted reading materials designed for the incipient stages of developmental reading. The use of a special, invariant "phonetic alphabet" such as the Initial Teaching Alphabet for teaching initial decoding skills and the so-called "language experience approach", in which children dictate stories which are written down and then given back to them to read, certainly depart to some extent from traditional reading primers. So we can conclude that it is not the specially adapted materials themselves which are at the heart of the matter, but the nature of the materials.

Although other kinds of alternative strategies in teaching reading may engender some debate, the controversy over dialect readers still stands in a class of its own. There seem to be several major reasons for this controversy. One reason involves the deliberate use of socially stigmatized language forms in written material. This tactic is viewed by some as a reinforcement of nonstandard dialect patterns, thus flying in the face of traditional mainstream, institutional values endorsing standard dialects. After all, educational tolerance of socially stigmatized forms in spoken language is in itself a significant

departure from a tradition committed to stamping out such forms; to confront them in written text designed to teach people how to read was simply too much. Even the potential readers for whom the materials were designed found these stigmatized forms objectionable even when these forms were shown to be in common use in their everyday language use. For example, Stokes (1974), using a "cloze" technique, showed that incipient readers tended to substitute standard forms in reading even when such forms were not regularly used in their spoken style.

It is quite clear that vernacular dialects have been defined in our society as inappropriate vehicles for literacy, and it is apparent that children are socialized regarding this functional differentiation from the onset of their socialization regarding literacy. In this respect, the situation is akin to some third world situations in which unwritten minority languages are considered inappropriate for literacy vis-a-vis official state languages even when knowledge of the official language is minimal or non-existent.

Another reason that these readers were considered so objectionable concerns the fact that this approach singled out particular groups of readers for special materials, namely, those who speak vernacular dialects. And in this case, it was Vernacular Black English speakers. This selective process was viewed as patronizing, and ultimately, racist and classist educational differentiation. This may have been unfortunate and even unfair, but the perception could not be denied. In fact,

targeting particular materials for special dialect groups was considered so patronizingly offensive that one mother declared that she would rather not have her child learn how to read at all than to learn to read such unsightly language.

A Sociolinguistic Perspective

From the viewpoint of educational sociolinguistics, the use of dialect readers is based on three assumptions: (1) that there is a sufficient mismatch between a potential reader's linguistic system and the Standard English text to warrant distinct materials (2) that the benefits from reading success will outweigh any negative connotations associated with the use of a socially stigmatized variety and (3) that the use of vernacular dialects in reading will promote reading success.

From the standpoint of simple linguistic processing, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the greater the mismatch between the spoken and written word, the greater the likelihood of processing difficulties in reading. But the real issue is whether dialect differences are great enough to become a significant barrier to linguistic processing. At this point, there still remain no carefully-designed experimental studies that have examined this important research question in detail, but several observations are germane to this issue. First of all, there is some indication that vernacular dialect speakers do have receptive capability to process most spoken Standard English utterances whether or not they use this variety productively.

Although receptive and productive capability in language may not transfer to the reading process in the same way, we would certainly expect considerable carryover from this receptive capability in spoken Standard English to the reading process, which is itself a receptive language activity.

Writing, a productive process, may be more transparently influenced by dialect divergence, and a number of different studies have documented the influence of spoken language differences on writing (Wolfram and Whiteman 1971; Farr-Whiteman 1981). Even with productive medium of writing, however, it should be noted that the influence of spoken language on writing is not isomorphic. Generalized strategies affecting both Standard English and vernacular dialect speakers account for some types of divergence, and not all predicted influence from spoken vernacular dialects is realized for various sociolinguistic reasons, so that the picture of written language divergence for vernacular speakers is somewhat more complicated than we might expect at first glance (Farr-Whiteman 1981; Farr and Daniels 1986).

It is, of course, erroneous to assume that Standard English speakers confront written language that is identical to the way they speak and vernacular speakers do not. In reality, all readers encounter written text that differs from spoken language to some extent. Even in early reading, sentences with an adverbial complement moved to the beginning of the sentence (e.g. Over and over rolled the ball, Up the hill he ran) represent a

written genre that differentiates written from spoken language for ALL speakers. So the problem of mismatch between written and spoken language is a matter of degree rather than kind.

Admittedly, the gap between written language and spoken language will be greater for vernacular dialect speakers than it is for speakers of standard varieties. But is this gap wide enough to cause problems on the basis of linguistic differences alone? Again, carefully controlled experimentation of this issue is lacking, although I am reminded of the fact that there are situations in the world where the gap between spoken dialect and written text is quite extensive without resulting in significant reading problems. In northern Switzerland, for example, texts are written in standard German although much of the population speaks Swiss German, yet the Swiss population does not reveal significant reading failure. Although it is difficult to measure "degree of dialect difference" in a precise way, Swiss German is certainly as different from standard written German as many vernacular dialects of English are from standard written English. (Fishman 1969:1109). Pointing to linguistic mismatch as a primary variable in reading failure among vernacular speakers thus seems suspect. As we shall see, differences in the written and spoken language may have to be taken into account by an aware reading instructor, but it is doubtful that the neutralization of these differences in reading material would alleviate the reading problems associated with various vernacular-speaking populations.

Given children's socialization into mainstream attitudes and values about dialects at an early age, there is also little reason to assume that the socio-psychological benefits of using a vernacular dialect would outweigh the disadvantages. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case, as children reject nonstandard forms in reading and parents and community leaders rail against their use in dialect readers. A positive relationship between reading success and the use of vernacular dialect readers also has not been firmly established. Some initial investigation of dialect readers reported slight gains for children given these materials (Leaverton 1973), but substantive research in favor of dialect readers is lacking. Due to the continuing controversy surrounding the use of dialect primers, this alternative now has been largely abandoned.

To say that dialect readers do not hold promise does not, however, suggest that the representation of dialect can never be used advantageously in literacy. In fact, there is a sustainable vernacular language literacy which may have merit in its own right. Vernacular dialects are written in two main contexts. One is dialogue sequences in novels and short stories, where the dialect captures the indigenous community character of the speaker. In fact, it would be quite unreal and inappropriate for writers to represent speakers from these communities in any other way, and these passages make speakers authentic representatives of their communities. The other literate tradition for vernacular dialects is the poetry of well-known and respected

African American writers who selectively write poetry in the community vernacular. Writers such as Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Maya Angelou all use this technique to great advantage. In fact Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote approximately one-third of his poetry in vernacular dialect. Consider, for example, the following poem by Langston Hughes:

PREFERENCE

I likes a woman
six or eight and ten years older'n myself
I don't fool with these young girls
    Daddy, I want so-and-so
    I needs this, that, and the other.
But a old woman'll say,
    Honey, what does YOU need
    I just drawed my money tonight
    and it's all your'n
That's why I likes a older woman
who can appreciate me:
When she conversations you
it ain't forever, Gimme!

It is important to note that these writers coupled the selective use of verse written in vernacular dialect with standard English, showing their bidialectal facility. Vernacular verse seems to be contextualized as a "literature of the heart".

As Fasold (1990:3) notes, the literature of Vernacular Black English may have a place, but "its use is circumscribed and the settings considered appropriate have been quite consistent at least the past half century or so."

In retrospect, then, one of the major problems of dialect readers was their sociolinguistic insensitivity to the appropriate setting for the use of Black dialect. As it turns out there is a reading curriculum that uses a version of dialect materials, namely, Bridge: A Cross-Cultural Reading Program (Simpkins, Simpkins, and Holt 1977). This program is not designed for beginning readers but for older junior high and high school students who have experienced reading difficulty. The program limits the dialect text to passages representative of students' cultural background experiences so that the use of vernacular is placed in an appropriate community context. It also makes a sincere effort to provide positive motivation and successful reading experiences for students as the major component of the program. While this program has hardly been free of controversy, its limitation of dialect passages to culturally appropriate contexts has made it less offensive than other approaches which use dialect passages without regard for their culturally appropriate setting. By contextualizing dialect use in reading so that it fits into appropriate cultural contexts, these materials have avoided a major flaw of some of the "decontextualized" dialect primers. In fact, in many respects, the use of dialect passages in the Bridge program falls

in line with a well-established, fairly secure tradition of representing dialect in literature. In this instance, the intent is to seize upon this literary tradition of dialect representation for the benefit of a reader who may identify with the dialect rather than the representation of a dialect assumed to be different from that of the reader. Rigorous measurement of the outcomes of this program has not been undertaken, but it has been acclaimed in some circles as an approach to reading that capitalizes in a more positive, appropriate way on the use of a literate vernacular dialect. So, the selective literary uses of vernacular dialect in literacy programs may not be completely dead afterall.

Applying Sociolinguistic Knowledge to the Current Situation

Although there are some ways in which dialect may affect reading, most current approaches to literacy for vernacular dialect speakers play down simple linguistic differences as a primary factor in accounting for the high levels of reading failure found among vernacular-speaking populations. Instead, cultural values about reading, the process of socialization into the social activity of reading, and the mismatch between readers' interests and the content of reading material have been considered more essential factors in accounting for high failure rates among nonmainstream populations (e.g. Labov and Robins 1969). Focus on these other variables does not, however, excuse those involved in providing literacy for such populations from

understanding the ways in dialectal differences may impact on the reading process and from taking these factors into consideration in instruction. This was, in fact, the major point of the much heralded Ann Arbor Decision (1979), where it was decreed that educators had a responsibility to take into account sociolinguistic differences in their teaching of reading.

A Perspective on Language Variation for Practitioners

First of all, it seems to be essential for those involved in literacy on all levels to understand the kinds of reading processes that may be affected by dialect differences (For more detail, see Farr and Daniels 1986 and Christian and Wolfram 1989). For example, one process in reading which may be affected by dialect is decoding. Whereas different approaches to reading rely on decoding skills to varying degrees, and many current approaches deemphasize a basic decoding model of reading, the systematic "sounding out of letters" still appears to be a skill that readers should be familiar with.

A literacy worker engaged in decoding tasks with students must recognize that there are systematic differences in the symbol-sound relationships from dialect to dialect. For example, consider how a reader of a vernacular dialect might decode orally the passage "There won't be anything to do until he finds out if he can go without taking John's brother." A modified orthography is used here to indicate the pronunciation differences for the vernacular speaker.

An Example of Vernacular Dialect Decoding

Deuh won't be anything to do until he fin' out if he can go wifout takin' John_ brovuh.

Systematic decoding differences may affect a number of symbol-sound relationships in the example, such as the final consonant of find, the th of without, the th and final r of brother, and so forth. These differences are no more severe than variant regional decodings of the vowel au of caught (e.g. [ ] or [a]) or the s of greasy (e.g. [s] or [z]), except that they involve a couple of heavily stigmatized variants. The variant decoding becomes a problem only if an instructor does not recognize dialectally appropriate sound-symbol relationships and classifies these differences as errors in decoding. Imagine the confusion that might be created for a dialect speaker if an accurate dialect decoding such as th ---> [f] in without or th ---> [v] in brother is treated as a problem comparable to the miscoding of b as [d] or sh as [s]. To avoid this confusion and potential misdiagnosis of reading problems, literacy practitioners need to be able to separate dialect differences from actual reading disabilities. The potential impact of dialects on the decoding process can be minimized if reading instructors have this information.

It is also important to recognize that dialect differences may lead to reading "miscues" that derive from grammatical

differences, as indicated in the following vernacular dialect rendering of the passage given above.

An Example of Grammatical Mismatch in Written Text and Spoken Vernacular Dialect

It won't be nothing to do till he find_ out can he go without taking John_ brother.

The use of existential it for there, multiple negation, the absence of inflectional -s, and the inverted question order of can he go are all instances of mismatch between the spoken vernacular variety and the written word.

Given the potential for dialect influence in processing written text, it seems imperative that literacy instructors familiarize themselves with the linguistic structure of vernacular varieties.

Similar application can be made to the writing process, where spoken vernacular dialect features may influence the written form. It is not difficult to document cases of vernacular spoken language influence on the writing process similar to those cited for reading above; however, as Farr (1981) points out, dialect features are not reflective of spoken language in a simple isomorphic relationship, and we need to appeal to general developmental principles with respect to the writing process (e.g. inflectional suffixes may be omitted) and to principles related to the social evaluation of language (e.g.

highly stigmatized, stereotyped features are less likely to be used in writing) to account for the observed patterning of dialect features in the written language of vernacular dialect speakers.

The preceding paragraphs point to a need for literacy practitioners to know something about the structural details of the dialects of their vernacular-dialect speaking clientele in order to distinguish genuine language processing difficulties from dialectally-appropriate renditions. Our discussion also suggests that information about the social evaluation of forms needs to be acquired as a basis for understanding the nature of dialect manifestations in reading and writing, since different forms may be expected to manifest themselves at different points in the progression of literacy skills.

Another area of language variation to consider in the reading process involves the broader sociolinguistic base of language, including background cultural differences. In most current models of the reading process, the application of background knowledge is essential for comprehension. Readers need such background in order to derive meaning by inference; they may also need to apply knowledge about the world in order to process some of the literal content. For example, imagine the differences in how a third grader from California and one from New York City might interpret the following passage on the age of giant redwood trees. Incidently, this item appeared in the Metropolitan Achievement Test.

They are so big that roads are built through their trunks. By counting the rings inside the tree trunk, one can tell the age of the tree. (from Meier 1973)

Meier (1973:15) reports that some readers in New York conjured up fairy tale interpretations of this passage that included, among other things, pictures of golden rings lying inside trees. The fairy tale interpretation was certainly fostered by images of cars driving through giant holes in trees. On the other hand, those who live near the Redwood Forest in California would interpret the passage quite differently, since its literal content would match their knowledge of the world. There is certainly the potential for students to expand their range of experience through reading, but background information is critical for comprehension, and the reality of real world differences in experiential backgrounds must be confronted as part of the consideration of the broader sociolinguistic setting of reading. Different community language and culture experiences may, in fact, actually affect reading comprehension in both obvious and in subtle, important ways.

In the above paragraph, we see a need for literacy practitioners to know more than simply the structural details of vernacular speaking communities. Their knowledge of language variation must include the broader base of cultural background

and experience that vernacular dialect speakers bring to literacy situation.

Finally, we need to remember that dialect differences may have an effect on some of the metalinguistic tasks often associated with literacy skills. Beginning level reading assessment measures are particularly susceptible to the impact of dialect because of they often rely on metalinguistic tasks that are sensitive to dialect-specific decoding differences. For example, the use of minimal word pair tasks or rhyming tasks to measure decoding skills might result in misclassifying cases of dialect-appropriate symbol-sound relationships as incorrect responses. Consider test items (taken from an actual reading achievement test) that include the following word pairs as part of an attempt to determine early readers' specific decoding abilities.

Choose the words that sound the same:

pin/pen

reef/wreath

find/fine

their/there

here/hear

For speakers of some vernacular varieties, all of these items might legitimately sound the same. The "correct" response, however, would be limited to there/their and hear/here, based upon the Northern standard dialect norm. An informed perspective on language variation must therefore consider the ways in which

literacy skills are measured, including narrowly-based metalinguistic skills and broader based inferencing that bring background knowledge into play in the acquisition of literacy skills.

Language Variation for Vernacular Dialect Speakers

We have seen that there are several types of fundamental knowledge about language variation that essential for literacy practitioners to acquire to adequately serve the vernacular speaking community. But what about the speakers themselves who are acquiring literacy skills? Is there a need for them to know something about the nature of language variation? I would maintain that it is also essential for those acquiring literacy skills to be exposed to some fundamental notions about language variation. We must remember that speakers of vernacular dialects, like mainstream dialect speakers, have been socialized into the American mythology of ignorance about dialects. Operating on erroneous assumptions about language differences, it is easy for these learners to feel that since "they can't talk right", they can't learn literacy skills either. Such learners need to know that dialect divergence is natural and neutral linguistically, that the linguistic discrimination and prejudice they have been subjected to is unjustified, and that their indigenous dialect is systematically patterned with a linguistic history as viable as any other variety. The honest, open discussion of language prejudice, a brief examination of the

legitimate history of the vernacular dialect, and even an examination of the development of several exemplary structures may well be worth the time and effort in terms of moving learners to a less shameful view of their dialect. For example, showing the video American Tongues (available through the Center for New American Media, 524 Broadway, 2nd floor, New York, NY 10012-4408), The Black on White program from McNeil's Story of English (available through Films Incorporated, 5547 N. Ravenwood, Chicago, IL 60640-1199) series tend to get adult literacy students to talk much more openly and honestly about the unjustified prejudices about Vernacular Black English and to confront its legitimate history. Even a brief discussion of the relationship of the current-day aks pronunciation in Vernacular Black English to the older, mainstream English form (axon) from which was derived can help learners view their indigenous dialect in a less shameful light. In this context, exposing readers to some of the vernacular dialect verse of prominent African American writers might provide tacit support for the legitimacy of the dialect. Since we hypothesize that speakers who feel good about the way they speak are more likely to take the kinds of learning risks needed to acquire literacy skills than those who feel shameful about their spoken language, we may reason that there is an important educational benefit to be derived from the introduction of such material apart from our moral conviction to provide accurate information about dialects. I have now accumulated several enthusiastic testimonials from adult literacy

programs about the benefits of such information for learners, both in terms of the atmosphere surrounding the context of literacy instruction and the learners' willingness to engage in literacy instructional encounters. While this evidence is still anecdotal, it offers a reasonable working hypothesis to guide those who teach literacy skills to vernacular dialect speakers. And even if it doesn't prove beneficial when examined within the framework of a tightly controlled experimental design, we can be assured that people are ultimately better off knowing the truth about dialects. This goes for specialists in social dialectologists, literacy practitioners, and the vernacular dialect speakers acquiring basic literacy skills.

Language Variation for ESL Students

As perplexing as language variation sometimes is for native speakers of English, it is even more mystifying for ESL students. The standard version of English provided in most ESL curricula aims unrealistically at a dialect-neutral variety of English identified as General American Standard. And yet the majority of ESL learners are surrounded by a rich variety of dialects, including vernacular dialects of English for those who live in economically-impoverished conditions. It is not surprising for speakers living in these communities to report that they cannot comprehend the dialects of the vernacular dialects surrounding them while they comprehend the neutral variety they are taught in the ESL classroom.

Along the way, many ESL learners' socialization in American culture may lead them to adopt the same uncharitable, biased opinion of vernaculars as that so often found among native speakers of English. Furthermore, many ESL learners may, in fact, speak vernacular varieties of their native languages that are comparable in status to the vernacular dialects of English. It thus seems appropriate to incorporate dimensions of language variation into the ESL curriculum so that such learners may share in the full, realistic range of language variation as offered ideally to their native English-speaking peers. In fact, the absence of a sociolinguistic perspective in most ESL programs robs them of their full educational potential. Theoretically, it deprives students from an honest understanding of the nature of language variation -- a perspective that can lead to an authentic sociolinguistic appreciation for the natural basis of variation in both their native and their second language. Practically, it deprives students from the practical benefits or learning about everyday English -- the "real world" varieties of English that they will actually face in their everyday sociolinguistic interaction. In the real world, sociolinguistic success is determined by the ability to carry out everyday affairs with a wide range of English speakers -- speakers who speak different dialects, including vernacular ones. ESL programs have much to gain from adopting a curriculum that includes a healthy understanding of language variation.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the obvious correlation between low levels of literacy and membership in a vernacular-speaking dialect group, there does not appear to be substantive evidence for concluding that dialect per se is a major variable in explaining this relationship between illiteracy and speaking a vernacular dialect. At the same time, however, this fact does not let literacy practitioners off the language variation hook. I have stressed that there are several reasons why knowledge of language variation is critical for such practitioners, as knowledge about dialect differences affects numerous activities related to literacy, including the interpretation of reading behavior, teaching procedures, metalinguistic activities related to literacy, and attitudes about those who do not speak standard varieties of English. In addition, I have suggested that vernacular dialect speakers themselves have nothing to lose and much to gain from exposure to some basic, fundamental notions about language variation.

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